

Youth get early start on military training

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While students returned to school with countless stories and misadventures of their three-month summer break, many probably didn't have the experiences of Luis Garcia and Hector Ontiveros.

Garcia, 17, a cadet 2nd Lieutenant, and Ontiveros, 14, a cadet, are members of the Great Plains Bison Squadron of Garden City, and they spent some of their summer learning what it takes to be a member of the Civil Air Patrol.



Luis Garcia, left, and Hector Ontiveros spent their summer training with the Civil Air Patrol. The pair meets every Tuesday at Garden City Regional Airport.

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The CAP is a sub-branch of the U.S. Air Force, Garcia said, and its cadet program trains young men and women ranging from ages 12 to 18.

The program teaches teamwork, leadership, aerospace education, technical skills to support emergency services and military history and customs, Garcia said.

Ontiveros, along with other cadets, attended a regional CAP encampment in Rapid City, S.D. The encampment consisted of cadets learning CAP drills and ceremonies, he said.

"It was practically boot camp," he said. "We slept in barracks, woke up at 5 in the morning to do drills. Even though it was tough, it was a lot of fun."

Garcia has been in the CAP for two years. He was invited to be part of the National Blue Beret program in Oshkosh, Wis., which is held at the National EAA AirVenture air show.

"Cadets across the nation came to be part of one of the world's biggest air shows," he said.

Garcia was involved in marshalling planes at the show.

"The first day is intimidating," he said. "You have these big propellers in your face, but after the third day it's an easy job."

Garcia also was in charge of radio traffic during the air show. He said his task was to inform pilots of incoming or outgoing aircrafts.

The Great Plains Bison Squadron is a group of cadets who meet Tuesdays at the Garden City Regional Airport.

Garcia said currently the squadron has five members, all youth from around the area.

"As long as there's cadets in the squadron, we'll keep going," he said.

Garcia said the cadets coordinate the meetings. They have a chaplain and military personnel come once a month to lecture over the core values of the CAP and aircraft safety.

"Each Tuesday has a designated topic," he said. "The first Tuesday consists of aerospace education, and the others about the ethics of being a cadet and safety and physical training."

The CAP is an activity for anyone interested in aviation or the military, Garcia said.

"It's a good opportunity for kids looking for something to do," he said. "The cadet program is very rewarding."

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